The Builder.

No. CXXXIV.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 30, 1845.

NOTWITHSTANDING the search that is now made after old buildings, and the efforts used to induce their preservation, there are numerous interesting structures in the villages and hamlets of England falling to decay unknown and disregarded,—structures which are most valuable as records of the past, and evidences of the skill of our forefathers. Shrouded by a clump of trees, in some cases not a hundred yards from a high road, they remain unnoticed, even by the passers-by, although worth a pilgrimage,—and, full of the accumulated remembrances of past centuries impressed in the varying handwriting of different generations, are allowed to fall into ruin, or, worse still, are destroyed for the sake of the materials of which they are composed, and so disappear entirely.

It would hardly be thought that this could occur in a locality so close to the metropolis as Slough, the much-frequented station of a railroad. But so in a great degree it is: for we will venture to say that of the crowds of sight-seers who daily go from that place to Eton and to Windsor, not one in a *week* is aware that he passes within five minutes' walk of an interesting structure six or seven centuries old, if not more, dismantled and decaying; and perhaps there is not one in a *month* leaves the road and wends his way to visit it.

Yet there it is. Old Upton Church, so called to distinguish it from a modern monstrosity seen in the high road to Eton, is a genuine remnant of the Norman period, consisting of nave, chancel, and solid square tower, the latter standing between the two former. The chancel is peculiarly interesting, and should on no account be suffered to fall further into ruin. It is small and low; lighted by narrow, semi-circular-headed windows in the sides, and a plain three-light window, of small dimensions, in the east wall, this latter being an interpolation of later date. It is covered with groin-vaulting, and is paved, or rather *was* paved, with encaustic tiles. There is a pretty Norman doorway on the north side of the nave, and another entrance, through the tower, on the south side. The tower itself is covered with a mass of ivy of extraordinary magnitude, the main stem being no less than three feet wide and one foot two inches thick.

The interior presents a melancholy scene; all the fittings are removed with the exception of one rude desk with a prayer-book upon it: the stained glass and brasses have been stolen, the plastering is tumbling, and the whole in ruin. Full service has not been performed in this church since 1837, but the burial prayers are sometimes read here, in the midst of the desolation, over the bodies of those who have desired to be buried in the quiet yard around it, where

"The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

This line from Gray's "Elegy in a country churchyard" reminds us, that independently of the interest thrown around this structure by time, there are other circumstances which render a visit to it pleasing, and should aid in inducing its preservation. It was probably this very church that Gray had in his mind's eye when that elegy was written:—"the ivy-mantled tow'r," whence "the moping owl does to the moon complain." Gray was educated at Eton, and long bore it in memory. The elegy in question was not written there, but was commenced a few years after he had left, about the same time that he wrote the ode on a distant prospect of Eton College, beginning:—

"Ye distant spires, ye antique towers,
That crown the watery glade,
Where grateful science still adores
Her Henry's holy shade."*

Further, in this interesting old church rest the remains of our eminent countryman Sir William Herschell. In the tower, amongst ruin, is a modern slab of marble recording his name and merits, looking sadly out of place and suggesting to the mind the uncertainty of such memorials. "In perpetual memory," writes upon marble an affectionate son or sorrowing widow:—In a score of years the church may be a ruin, and the "lasting testimony" part of the paving of a churchwarden's pig-sty!

"So perish monuments of mortal birth,
So perish all in turn, save well-recorded worth."

Surely, however, Herschell's grave is not yet to be desecrated. Every tomb that can awaken some sentiment, excite to enterprise, or stimulate to good, should be religiously preserved as of national importance.†

As regards the church itself, it is seriously to be hoped that means will immediately be taken to preserve it yet for many years to come. Mr. Britton interested himself warmly to effect its restoration some time ago, and at this moment Mr. Jesse, well known to the reading public, is seeking to raise a subscription for that purpose. We trust he will not relax in his endeavours, and that he will be aided by all in the district who have influence.

* Gray was one of the first to apply himself to the revived study of pointed architecture, and from him Mr. Bentham derived much assistance in his celebrated "History of Ely." Horace Walpole was one of his most intimate associates at Eton, and they afterwards set out together for the tour of France and Italy, but quarrelled on the road through Gray's greater love of antiquities. Gray died 1771.

† We take this opportunity to refer to a letter on the present dilapidated state of Chaucer's tomb, in Westminster Abbey, which appeared in *The Times* a few days ago. The writer says that the name of the father of English poetry can only be deciphered by the assistance of a tracing in chalk over the letters. Thus few persons are aware when loitering through Poet's-corner, that they are treading over the ashes of one whose memory ought to be respected by all his countrymen; and foreigners visiting England must feel surprise in viewing the ruinous appearance of the grave of our oldest English poet. Were the tomb only repaired in some degree, and a slab of marble inserted in the wall, with the old inscription, which is extant, cut neatly upon it, this would be something, and might be done at but a trifling cost.

The tomb of Edmund Spenser was restored by private subscription in 1778. Shall we feel less alive than our forefathers seventy years ago, to the claims which these fathers of verse have upon our loving and respectful memory? The tomb of the great father of poetry was erected by N. Brigham, who, in the year 1556, "in the name of the Muses," placed the present inscription (now by the hand of all-devouring time rendered almost illegible). Let us then entertain a hope that very shortly, in these days of light and knowledge, some respect will be shewn to the mighty dead, and that the author of the "Canterbury Tales" will not be suffered to lie in a spot unmarked, and with scarcely his name discernible, except to some inquiring antiquary. Let us in this imitate the excellent feelings of our continental neighbours, who treasure up with the most sacred love the tombs and inscriptions relating to their poets and statesmen.

THE UNREWARDED EXHIBITORS IN WESTMINSTER HALL.

THE following letters have passed between the royal commission on the Fine Arts, and a certain number of the competitors at Westminster Hall.

Chester-street, July 17th, 1845.

SIR,—In concurrence with a general feeling among the competitors whose works are now exhibited in Westminster Hall, I have the honour to transmit to you the accompanying memorial to the royal commission on the Fine Arts, signed by a few of the competitors who happen to be in town. The necessity for its being submitted without delay prevents its being signed by several who are out of town, and who, I am informed, would hasten their return for the purpose of signing it if that were deemed necessary.

A consideration of delicacy alone prevents some of the rewarded candidates from affixing their names to the suggestion, which they cordially approve.

I am, Sir, Your obedient Servant,
F. Y. HURLSTONE.

To C. L. Eastlake, Esq., R.A.
Secretary to the Royal Commission of Fine Arts.

To the Right Honourable Her Majesty's Commissioners on the Fine Arts,—The memorial of the undersigned Artists, Competitors for the decoration of the New Houses of Parliament, and exhibitors in the present exhibition in Westminster Hall.

Sheweth,—That the improvement of public taste and the encouragement of those artists who are disposed to forego the more lucrative branches of art for the higher walks of historic and poetical composition, are essential objects of your royal commission.

That three experimental exhibitions have now taken place under the authority of your honourable board; an amount of talent far beyond expectation has afforded gratification to the public, and received the repeated approbation of your honourable commission. On the first occasion 137 artists responded to your invitation. In 1844, besides sculptors, sixty-one painters applied their exertions to cartoon-drawing and fresco painting, and received the sanction of your honourable commissioners, as worthy to be selected for public exhibition. In 1845, thirty-seven painters and twenty-nine sculptors are again before the public, with the approbation of your honourable commission.

That the advantage of these exhibitions to public taste and to the arts are indeed great, but unfortunately they have been attended with serious injury to most of the artists from the great expense (as well as loss of time and connection) that has resulted. The actual outlay of the painters for materials and models cannot be less than 8,000*l.* or 10,000*l.*; a loss sufficient to check their progress in future attempts, and in some instances perhaps to involve them in serious difficulties. Their desire to co-operate in this great national experiment, and to assist in furthering the noble course marked out by your honourable commission, will surely be listened to with that indulgence and respect that is seldom denied to men who have suffered in a good cause, and must be their excuse for thus troubling your honourable board with the following remarks.

That it appears that the receipts of the exhibitions of the first and second years were, repectively, 2,900*l.* and 1,400*l.*; and if we suppose 1,000*l.* to be received this year, the amount is 5,300*l.*, of which sum 1,000*l.* were given in 1843, in additional premiums, leaving 4,300*l.* unappropriated. If 500*l.* are deducted from the second, and 200*l.* from the third years' receipts for the sculptors, who according to the general opinion were not, like the painters, led out of their accustomed course, there will be the following sums to be divided by the number of unrewarded candidates in each year.

1843. 1,000*l.* among 116 unrewarded Candidates.					give 15*l.* 10*s.* each.
1844.	900*l.*	—	53	ditto	ditto 16*l.* 8*s.* —
1845.	3600*l.*	—	116	ditto	ditto 30*l.* 15*s.* —

Thus, to those who have tried but once, there would be a return of from 15*l.* 10*s.* to 30*l.* 15*s.*; those who have competed twice would receive from 31*l.* 18*s.* to 47*l.* 3*s.*, and the few who have struggled on through all the three years, would have 62*l.* 13*s.* out of a fund raised from their own previous sacrifices; not indeed half the amount of their actual outlay in models and materials, but each in proportion to his former exertions and sacrifices would be enabled to make another effort in this great national experiment, with fresh energy and increased experience.

Your memorialists humbly submit to the wisdom of your Honourable Commission the advantages of a self-supporting system of emulation, instead of that of premiums which renders each succeeding competition more unequal; and in the hope that the proceedings of your honourable commission will secure to

For Info on PDF Compression and OCR go to our website